DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 196 088 CS 503 190

AUTHOR Pearson, Judy C.; Sorenson, Ritch L.
TITLE The Basic Speech Communication Course: A Review of Past Practices and Current Preferences.
PUB DATE Nov 80
NOTE 36p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (66th, New York, NY, November 13-16, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Alumni; *Communication Research; *Core Curriculum; Course Content; Course Descriptions; *Course Evaluation; Higher Education; *School Surveys; *Speech Communication; *Speech Curriculum; Student Attitudes; Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to assess the extent to which the basic speech communication course fulfilled the needs of students and alumni of a large midwestern university. Specifically, the study sought to discover whether the basic course should be required and whether public speaking, interpersonal communication, or another activity should be the focus of the basic course. Telephone interviews were conducted with students and former students who had completed the basic course. The findings revealed that the content of the basic speech communication course fulfilled the needs of students and alumni. Both groups recommended that the course be required, that the course should combine interpersonal communication and public speaking, and that it should emphasize practice over theory. (FL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED196088

THE BASIC SPEECH COMMUNICATION COURSE: A REVIEW OF PAST PRACTICES AND CURRENT PREFERENCES

JUDY C. PEARSON

RITCH L. SORENSON

DEPARTMENT OF SPEECH

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

AMES, IOWA

50011

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Judy Pearson

Ritch L. Sorenson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

C 5503 190

Abstract

This study determined the preferences and perceptions of the students and alumni at a large midwestern university toward the basic speech communication course. These preferences were placed in the context of past practices in the basic course as determined by a number of national surveys. The comparisons allow implications for the future.

THE BASIC SPEECH COMMUNICATION COURSE: A REVIEW OF PAST PRACTICES AND CURRENT PREFERENCES

Two traditional and fundamental goals of the basic speech communication course are to introduce students to the field of speech communication and to meet basic communication proficiency needs. Thus, when establishing a basic course curriculum in speech communication training, institutions typically are responsible (1) for teaching the theory and principles that are well established in the discipline and (2) for meeting basic communication needs of their students. The purpose of this study is to assess the extent to which the content of the basic course fulfills the needs of students and alumni and to consider the suggestions they have for the composition of the basic course.

Most research regarding the basic course has been concerned with assessing the accepted and established curriculum of the basic course. Reference to these studies aids departments in determining if their curriculum is consistent with the curriculum of other speech communication departments. A number of surveys have provided descriptive information about what currently occurs in the first course (Dedmon, 1965; Dedmon and Frandsen, 1965; Hargis, 1956; JOnes, 1955; London, 1963, 1964; Gibson, Kline and Gruner, 1974; Gibson, Gruner, Brooks, and Petrie, 1970; Berryman and Weaver, 1979, and Gibson, Gruner, Hanna, Smythe, and Hayes, 1980).

These studies have aided departments in establishing parameters for acceptable practices among professionals in speech communication. They do not, however, address the important issue of individual student communication needs.

Relatively few studies have attempted to tap student preferences and perceptions. In one of these studies, Lohr (1974) asked alumni to rate the communication activities that were most frequently used in their professions, were most important, and provided the greatest difficulty for them. Respondents identified social conversations, decision making, and information giving to one other person as the activities that were most frequently used. Giving information and making decisions with one person and giving information to a group were cited as the three most important activities for alumni. Among the most difficult activities identified were persuading a group, making decisions with a group, and persuading a person.

McCroskey (1977) compared the large lecture, small individual section, and an individualized instructional format with the preferences of the high communication apprehensive student and found that they preferred large lectures. Pearson and Yoder (1980) similarly investigated the perceptions and preferences of the high communication apprehensive student. They

found that high communication apprehensive students avoided the public speaking course when an alternative interpersonal course was available and that they perceived the public speaking course to be more threatening than the interpersonal communication course.

No one, to our knowledge, has systematically related approaches to teaching the basic course with student preferences. Frequent and thorough surveys of basic course faculty members have not been augmented by similar investigations of student preferences and perceptions. The current study was undertaken in order to determine the extent to which past practices in the basic course are validated by the perceptions and preferences of the students in the course.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this survey was to determine the preferences and perceptions of the students and alumni toward the basic speech communication course. Specifically, information was sought on whether a basic course should be required and whether public speaking, interpersonal communication, or another course should be the focus of the basic course. The numbers and kinds of speeches and oral exercises that students and alumni preferred were investigated. Finally, we considered the format of the course, the ratio of theory to practice, and the desired enrollment in each course.

PROCEDURE

The investigators began by examining previous surveys that had been conducted on the basic speech communication course. Questionnaire items were consistent with those employed in previous studies. Four previous surveys (Gibson, Gruner, Books, and Petrie, 1970; Gibson, Kline, and Gruner, 1974; Berryman and Weaver, 1979; and Gibson, Gruner, Hanna, Smythe, and Hayes, 1980) were used as a basis for obtaining items. Seventeen items were included in the questionnaire for the alumni subjects and fourteen items were included in the questionnaire for the student subjects. These questionnaires were examined by three other colleagues who added clarity and precision to the items. The survey was designed to be conducted on the telephone; therefore, the items were pretested in telephone interviews. Items were altered that provided the respondents with confusion or ambiguity.

Six female students participated in conducting the telephone surveys. Interviewers were trained and supervised by the investigators to insure that they conducted the interviews consistently. Interviewers were instructed to read questions verbatim and were advised on responses to particular questions. The telephone interviews were conducted between February 3 and February 13, 1980, in the afternoon and early evening hours.

The subjects for this study were students and alumni of a large midwestern university who had completed the basic speech communication course. Respondents were randomly selected from the basic course rosters for the academic years 1972-1973 and 1973-1974 (alumni) and for the academic years 1977-1978 and 1978-1979 (students). Selecting only those persons who had completed the basic course insured that each respondent had a basis for evaluating the course. Eighty nine per cent of those students who were telephone and 73% of those alumni who were telephoned
Eighty nine per cent of those students who were telephoned and seventy three per cent of those alumni who were telephoned were contacted and did participate in this survey. Eleven per cent of the students and twenty seven per cent of the alumni could not be reached, did not answer their telephone, or were unavailable. Interviews were completed with the students and 106 alumni. Each interview was between five and ten minutes in length.

RESULTS

Seven major questions were considered in this study: (1) Should the basic speech communication course be required? (2) What approach or orientation should characterize the basic course? (3) Should the basic course be primarily theoretical or performance oriented? (4) How many oral assignments should be required? (5) What kind of oral assignments should be required? (6) In what format should the basic course be offered? and (7) How many students should be enrolled in each section of the basic course?

In the results that follow, each of these questions is considered in terms of descriptive information provided by other surveys which were conducted in 1968 (Gibson, Gruner, Brooks, and Petrie, 1970), 1973 (Gibson, Kline, and Gruner, 1974), 1977 (Berryman and Weaver, 1979), and 1978 (Gibson, Gruner, Hanna, Smythe, and Hayes, 1980). Next, student and alumni preferences and perceptions in 1980, which were determined in this survey, are provided. Finally, comparisons are made and implications are offered.

1. Should the basic course be required?

In 1968 (Gibson, Gruner, Brooks, and Petrie, 1970), 40% of all of the institutions that responded required a basic speech course. The figure represented a decrease from the 1963-1964 survey (Dedmon and Frandsen, 1965) which found that about 51% of the responding institutions required a basic speech course. In 1973 (Gibson, Kline, and Gruner, 1974), respondents were asked specific information about which colleges in their universities required a basic speech course. At that time, 58% of colleges of arts & sciences, 62% of the colleges of education, 42% of the colleges of business, 37% of the preprofessional colleges, and 42% of the humanities colleges required the course. The interpersonal communication course was required

by smaller percentages of colleges in the 1977 survey (Berryman and Weaver, 1979) which focused on the interpersonal communication course. Specifically, 37% of colleges of arts & sciences, 28% of the colleges of education, 24% of the colleges of business, 24% of the preprofessional colleges, and 26% of the humanities colleges required the basic interpersonal communication course. In 1978 (Gibson, Gruner, Hanna, Smythe, and Hayes, 1980), some change occured in the percentage of those colleges that required the basic course: 53% of the colleges of education, 45% of the arts and sciences colleges, and 50% of the business schools required the basic course.

At the institution investigated in this study, the basic course was required by all of the colleges in the University with the exception of the College of Engineering. Within Engineering, many departments required the course. All of the respondents had completed the basic course. Seventy seven per cent of the students responded that a basic course should be required; ninety three per cent of the alumni favored a required basic course.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE.]

An examination of Table 1 which summarizes the findings of the five most recent surveys on the basic speech communication course allows us to draw a number of conclusions about the requirement of the basic course. First, it appears that the basic interpersonal course is required

by a smaller percentage of colleges than is the general basic course. Second, the basic course was required by a smaller percentage of institutions in 1968 than in 1963, but it has not continued to drop as a requirement in subsequent years. Third, the basic course was required by a smaller percentage of colleges of arts & sciences and colleges of education in 1978 than in 1973, but a higher percentage of colleges or schools of business required the course in 1978. In general, the requirement of the basic speech communication course appears to have retained its strength over the past fifteen years.

The students and alumni in the current survey strongly recommend the requirement of a basic speech communication course. These respondents represent all of six colleges at a major midwestern university. Based on the recommendation of students and alumni, it would appear that the percentage of colleges that require the basic course is clearly warranted. The basic course should be required.

2. What approach or orientation should characterize the basic course?

The focus of the basic speech course has changed in the past decade. In the 1968 survey (Gibson, Gruner, Brooks, and Petrie, 1970), most institutions offered a public speaking course (54%), followed by fundamentals (21%), a multiple offering (13%), communication (4%),

and voice and articulation (2%). This situation had changed at at the time of the 1973 survey (Gibson, Kline, and Gruner, 1974). Most institutions listed a multiple offering (39%), followed by communication (24%), public speaking (21%), fundamentals (12%), and voice and articulation (1%). In 1978 (Gibson, Gruner, Hanna, Smythe, and Hayes, 1980), the most popular course was again public speaking (51%), followed by the combination public, interpersonal, group course (40%), interpersonal communication (5%), communication theory (2%), and small group communication (1%).

The changing nature of the basic course that was reflected in these three surveys similarly occurred at the university which was investigated in this study. The interpersonal communication course was first offered in 1975 as an alternative to the basic public speaking course. Many colleges and departments allowed either course to meet the speech requirement. The interpersonal course grew rapidly, peaking in 1977, and began to decline. In 1980, 50% of the students reported that they had taken the interpersonal communication course and 57% of the students reported that they had taken public speaking. (7% of the student had completed both courses.)

Students in the current survey were asked if they felt the basic course should be public speaking, interpersonal communication, a combination of the two courses, or a variety of other options. The leading choice was the

combination course which included both public speaking and interpersonal communication (54%); followed by different options (31%), public speaking (11%), interpersonal communication (2%), and others (2%). This result is particularly interesting given that none of the students had enrolled in a combination course and few of them (7%) had enrolled in both interpersonal communication and public speaking.

Alumni respondents had primarily enrolled in public speaking (92%). Only 8% of the respondents had taken interpersonal communication and another 7% had taken a different course to fulfill the basic speech requirement. (The percengage in excess of 100% is a result of 8 students enrolling in more than one option.) Alumni, as did students, selected the combination course as their first choice for a speech requirement on the basic course level (55%), followed by a number of different course options (33%), interpersonal communication (7%), public speaking (4%), and other (1%). These results are even more remarkable than are the students' responses. Nearly all alumni had taken public speaking, yet few recommended it as a required course. It is unlikely that alumni respondents rejected the public speaking course as more threatening as high communication apprehensive students had done in the study by Pearson and Yoder (1980), since they selected a course which included a public speaking component. Rather, it appears that alumni and students are selectng a course which is most relevant to their needs.

The clear preference, for students and alumni, is the combination or hybrid course. Regardless of which course the respondents had experience with, they chose the course

which combined public speaking and interpersonal communication. The second choice, for both groups, would be a variety of options including such subject matter as interviewing, group discussion, debate, and other choices. Few responderts would select public speaking or interpersonal communication as the required basic course. Table 2 summarizes the past practices and the current preferences of students and alumni.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE.]

Two conclusions are warranted. First, the pendulum appears to have swung away from public speaking in the early 1970's, but now appears to have swung back. Public speaking appears to be the strongest course in 1968 and again in 1978. Second, student and alumni preferences, while very similar, do not recommend current practice. The majority of students and alumni recommend the combination course and view public speaking to be far down on the list of recommended required courses. An inverse relationship appears to exist between student and alumni preferences and current practices.

3. Should the course be primarily theoretical or performance oriented?

In 1973 (Gibson, Kline, and Gruner, 1974), when all of the various kinds of basic courses that were offered were considered together, 5% offered more theory than practice; 18% offered an equal amount of theory and practice; and 76% offered more practice than theory. When the basic public speaking course was considered separately, a greater performance orientation could be identified. More theory

than practice was offered in 2% of the courses; an equal amount of theory and practice was offered in 15% of the courses; and 83% of the courses included more performance than theory. When communication courses were considered as a separate kind of basic course, a different trend was apparent. Although more communication courses included a greater proportion of performance than theory (53%), followed by an equal amount of theory and performance (25%), and a greater proportion of theory than performance (21%), a trend toward more theory was clear. The relationship of theory to performance was similar in 1977 (Berryman and Weaver, 1979) to the 1973 figures for communication courses. In 1977, 56% of the courses offered more practice than theory; 24% offered an equal amount of theory and performance; and 18% offered more theory than practice. In 1978 (Gibson, Gruner, Hanna, Smythe, and Hayes, 1980), when all of the basic course options were combined, 33% of the courses offered more theory than practice; 13% offered an equal amount of theory and practice; and 54% included more practice than theory.

Students in 1980 reported that their courses were comprised as follows: 19% had courses which included more theory than practice, 41% had courses which included an equal amount of theory and practice; and 40% had courses which included more practice than theory. Student preferences

clearly favored more practice than theory (53%) or an equal amount of theory and practice (45%). Alumni respondents similarly favored more practice than theory (79%) or an equal amount of theory and practice (20%). Only 2% of the students and 1% of the alumni felt that the course should be comprised of more theory than practice.

[INSERT TABLE 3 HERE.]

An examination of Table 3 which depicts the relationship between theory and practice in all basic courses in 1973, 1978, and 1980, and student and alumni preferences of the proportion of theory to practice in 1980 allows three conclusions. First, a trend toward more theory than practice appears to be occuring in the basic course. At the institution under investigation in this study, the tendency was not as marked. Second, former basic course students appear to appreciate the performance aspects of the course more as they are further removed from the course. Finally, the trend toward more theory in the basic course has an inverse relationship to the stated preferences of former students of the basic course as they are further removed from the course. In other words, if the trend toward

more theory continues, alumni may show a decreased amount of satisfaction with the course. Happily, at the current time, student and alumni preferences do not appear to be severely out of synchronization with past practice and the current situation at their own institution.

4. How many oral assignments should be required?

In 1968 (Gibson, Gruner, Brooks, and Petrie, 1970), students enrolled in the basic course gave an average of five speeches per term. Two-thirds of the responding institutions reported requiring four to seven speeches while one third of the institutions reported requiring eight or more speeches. Although the data was unavailable, we might assume that most of the reporting institutions were on a semester system as is the national trend. In 1973 (Gibson, Kline, and Gruner, 1974), when all of the various basic courses were considered together, 5% of the courses had a requirement of 0 public speeches, 18% required one to three speeches, 50% required four to six speeches, 18% required seven to eight speeches, and 7% required nine to ten speeches. When the public speaking course was examined separately from the other basic courses, even more speeches were required. 3% required 0 speeches, 7% required one to three speeches, 60% required four to six speeches, 21% required seven to eight speeches, and 8% required nine to ten speeches. Communication courses

in 1973 required fewer speeches. 15% required 0 speeches, 39% required one to three speeches, 32% required four to six speeches, 11% required seven to eight speeches, and 2% required nine to ten speeches.

In 1978 (Gibson, Gruner, Hanna, Smythe, and Hayes, 1980), when all of the basic courses were grouped together, 15% included no speeches, 16% included one to three speeches, 43% included four to six speeches, 19% had seven to ten, and 7% required more than ten oral performances. When the public speaking course was segregated from the others and examined, 0% had no performances, 6% included one to three speeches, 68% include four to six, 23% included seven to ten, and 3% had over ten oral performances.

In the current survey, students and alumni had enrolled in the basic speech communication course on the quarter system. Of those students surveyed in 1980 who had completed the public speaking course, 0% delivered 0 speeches, 61% delivered one to three speeches, 34% delivered four to six speeches, and 5% delivered more than six speeches. The recommended number of speeches by students is 1-3 (65%), followed by 4-6 (31%), followed by 0 (2%) or more than 6 (2%). Alumni respondents recommended 4-6 speeches (50%), followed by 1-3 (41%), followed by more than 6 (9%) and no speeches (0%).

Comparison among years and types of courses is difficult because researchers have used different numbers of speeches in each grouping. Nonetheless we can compare the figures for 1978 in the public speaking course, 1980 in public speaking, and student and alumni preferences in 1980. These figures are listed in Table 4. We must keep in mind, even with these figures, that the 1978 survey probably reflects the semester public speaking course while the other figures are based on a quarter length course. From this table it appears that students generally prefer the situation they experienced. Current practice may be in line with student preferences or the preferences may simply be based on current practice. Alumni respondents prefer more speaking opportunities than do their student counterparts. Understandably, students on the quarter system that were surveyed in this study had fewer public speaking opportunities that did students in the national survey.

[INSERT TABLE 4 HERE.]

Of the students who were surveyed in 1980 who had completed the interpersonal communication course, 36% reported that they participated in 1-3 oral assignments, 36% reported that they participated in 4-6 oral assignments, 26% reported that they participated in more than six oral assignments, and 2% of the students reported that they participated in no oral assignments. The recommended number of oral

assignments by students is one to three (56%), followed by four to six (35%), followed by more than six (9%), and zero (0%). Alumni suggested that four to six interpersonal activities be required (55%), followed by one to three (31%), more than six (11%), and zero (3%).

[INSERT TABLE 5 HERE.]

An examination of Table 5 allows us to determine a difference in the preferences of students and alumni. A trend toward fewer oral assignments in interpersonal communication appears to be the preference of students, while alumni respondents suggest an increase in oral interpersonal assignments. In both the interpersonal assignments and the public speaking assignments, alumni prefer more oral work.

5. What kinds of oral assignments should be required?

In 1968 (Gibson, Gruner, Brooks, and Petrie, 1970), basic course instructors responded that the informative speech was the topic that most often received significant time in most basic courses (92%), followed by the persuasive speech (90%). Group discussion received significant time in 45% of the courses, while the interview was considered in only 4% of the courses. This trend was similar to the public speaking course in 1973 (Gibson, Kline, and Gruner, 1974): the speech to inform was considered in 86% of the courses, the speech to persuade in 88% of the courses,

the group discussion in 27% of the courses, and the interview in 3% of the courses. Not surprisingly, the communication course in 1973 put more emphasis on interpersonal communication activities and devoted less attention to public speaking. Of the institutions reporting, 51% considered the informative speech, 57% included the persuasive speech, 74% included group discussion, and 35% included the interview.

In 1978 (Gibson, Gruner, Hanna, Smythe, and Hayes, 1980), instructors of public speaking courses reported that they devoted significant time to informative speaking in 91% of the cases, persuasive speaking in 88% of the sampled cases, and group discussion in 26% of the cases. Of the interpersonal communication courses that were included in the 1978 survey, 15% devoted significant time to the informative speech, 8% devoted significant time to the persuasive speech, and 69% spent significant time on the group discussion.

When students were asked in 1980 whether the speech to inform, the speech to persuade, or the presentational speech was the most important to be included in a basic course, they identified the presentational speech (4[illegible]), followed by the speech to inform (25%) and the speech to persuade (21%). (Six per cent of the students selected a different public speaking assignment as most important.) Alumni responded differently by identifying the speech

1973 and 1978. These two speech activities are seldom given significant time in interpersonal courses in 1978. The group discussion was sometimes included in the basic course in 1968, was included in about one-quarter of the public speaking courses in 1973 and 1978, and was included in 2/3 to 3/4 of the communication courses in 1973 and the interpersonal communication courses in 1978. Information on the interview was not available for 1978, but the available information suggests that it might occur more frequently in a communication course than in a public speaking class.

[INSERT TABLE 7 HERE.]

Students identified the presentational speech as the most important public speaking assignment in 1980 while alumni were nearly evenly split among the presentational speech, the informative speech, and the persuasive speech. The presentational speech is different from the other two types of speeches as it focuses more on the delivery aspects of the speech rather than the content. Pearson (1980) demonstrated that high school teachers spend a greater proportion of their speech criticism on delivery aspects rather than on content matters than do their counterparts on the college level. She suggests that the relative importance of content to delivery might be developmental; that is, that delivery is more elementary while content matters are more advanced. A similar phenomenon appears to operate

in this survey as alumni show less interest in the presentational speech which emphasizes delivery.

[INSERT TABLE 8 HERE.]

Students recommend the interview as the most important interpersonal communication activity while alumni identify the small group discussion as most important. This distinction between the two groups, which can be seen in Table 8, may be a function of current needs or expected future communication competencies. For instance, students may be considering employment interviews that will lead to occupational opportunities. Alumni, on the other hand, may view employment interviews as an historical event and may be more concerned with the day-to-day business conference, problem solving discussion, or staff meeting. Lohr (1974) found that alumni identified decision making with a group as the second most difficult communication activity in which they engage. Alumni preference for the group discussion in the basic course may be based on their felt need for improving an essential skill.

Alumni and student respondents also vary on the relative importance they assign to the conversation. Students see the conversation as far less important than do alumni. Lohr (1974) found that alumni identified the conversation as the most frequently used communication activity. The conversation was not among the most important nor the most difficult of the communication activities in which alumni participated, however. Alumni may be responding to the conversation in terms of frequency of occurence, or relevancy, in their communication behavior.

6. In what format should the basic course be offered?

In 1973 (Gibson, Kline, and Gruner, 1974), 16% of the respondents stated that they relied on the lecture/lab format in which to teach the basic course. This figure increased slightly in 1977 (Berryman and Weaver, 1979) in the interpersonal communication course in which 2% of the respondents used a mass lecture, 18% relied on lecture/lab, and 79% used independent sections exclusively.

A few of the students in the current survey had taken the basic course in a lecture/lab format (10%). When asked to distinguish between lecture/lab, a small, individual section, or lecture only, students identified the small, individual section as the preferred format in which to teach the basic course (88%), followed by the combination lecture/lab (12%). No students recommended the large lecture. Students' preferences may be a function of their experience with the course rather than an independent statement of prescription for the basic course.

Another explanation for the small preference for the lecture/lab format may be a result of a behavioral change which appears to occur in basic speech communication classrooms. Many students fear the required basic course before they enroll but become strong supporters of the course after they have completed it. They find the opportunities for communication rewarding after they have experienced them. The lecture/lab format does not allow as much opportunity for interaction. Students may prefer the small section

because of their enjoyment of oral communication. McCroskey (1977) found that high communication apprehensive students preferred the large lecture situation because they could avoid communicating with others; conversely, it is possible that persons who are not highly communication apprehensive may seek out situations in which they can communicate.

8. How many students should be enrolled in each section of the basic course?

In 1968 (Gibson, Gruner, Brooks, and Petrie, 1970), class size for most schools ranged from 17 to 22 students. This small class size was generally maintained in 1973 (Gibson, Kline, and Gruner, 1974) for the public speaking and fundamentals oriented courses. The interpersonal communication course generally enrolled between 23 and 30 students in 1973. While the communication and multiple courses were similarly most often taught with between 18 and 22 students, there was a slight trend toward larger courses. Similarly in 1978 (Gibson, Gruner, Hanna, Smythe, and Hayes, 1980), class size for most schools ranged from 18-22 students for all basic courses, with the exception of the interpersonal communication course which most often reported 22-30 students.

Students recommendations in 1980 encourage the continued practice of small classes. The optimum size for the basic course was identified as 20-25 (54% of the respondents), followed by less than 20 (41% of the respondents), and 26 or more (5% of the respondents). Past practice and

current preferences would discourage the use of large classes, lecture/lab arrangments, or large lectures in order to solve enrollment and cost efficiency concerns.

SUMMARY

One of the fundamental goals of the basic speech communication course is to meet the communication needs of the students. This survey demonstrates that the content of the basic course fulfills the needs of students and alumni at one large midwestern university. The basic speech communication course appears to be a viable part of the required curriculum. Students endorse the importance of the course by recommending its requirement. Alumni, who respond to the basic course from on the job experience, are even more supportive of requiring the basic course for all students.

The preferred required course, by students and alumni, is the course which combines interpersonal communication and public speaking. Both students and alumni feel that the course should have a greater amount of practice than of theory. Alumni appear to be even more adamant on this point than are the current students. Students recommend that 1-3 speeches be required while alumni recommend a higher number of speeches (4 6). Similarly, students suggest that 1-3 oral interpersonal communication assignments be

included, while alumni respondents state that 4-6 are preferred. The interview and the small group discussion were identified by both students and alumni as the two most important interpersonal activities to be included in the basic course. The informative speech, the persuasive speech, and the presentational speech were all seen to be important by various groups, with students showing a preference for the presentational speech and alumni recommending all three.

One of the features that has recommended the basic speech course for years has been the small size. This feature is strongly supported as students show high preference for the small autonomous section over a lecture/lab combination or a large lecture alone and as students recommend that the class size be limited to 20-25 students or less than 20 students per section.

Speech communication educators are best able to identify the basic theory and principles that should be included in the basic course. The students and alumni of the basic course are in the best position to determine the extent to which the content of the basic course fulfills their basic communication needs. Both perspectives are essential in developing a viable and sound basic course. At the present time we are able to demonstrate the relevancy and meaningfulness of our basic course from this survey of the students and alumni at one university. Our ability to remain vital is dependent upon our sensitivity to the perspective offered by our students and alumni.

REFERENCES

Berryman, Cynthia L. and Weaver, Richard L. A survey of the interpersonal communication course at U. s. colleges and universities. San Antonio, Texas: Speech Communication Association Convention, 1979.

Dedmon, Donald N. The required first course in speech as oral communication. Central States Speech Journal, 1965, 16, 120-125.

Dedmon, Donald N. and Frandsen, Kenneth D. The 'required' first course in speech: A survey. Speech Teacher, 1964, 13, 32-37.

DiSalvo, Vincent, Larsen, David C. and Seiler, William J. Communication skills needed by persons in business organizations. Communication Education, 1976, 25, 269-275.

Gibson, James W., Gruner, Charles R., Brooks, William D. and Petrie, Jr., Charles R. The first course in speech: A survey of U. S. colleges and universities. Speech Teacher, 1970, 19, 13-20.

Gibson, James W., Gruner, Charles R., Hanna, Michael S. Smythe, Mary-Jeanette, and Hayes, Michael T. The basic course in speech at U. S. colleges and universities: III. Communication Education, 1980, 29, 1-9.

Gibson, James W., Kline, John A., and Gruner, Charles R. A re-examination of the first course in speech at U. S. colleges and universities. Speech Teacher, 1974, 23, 206-214.

Hargis, Donald E. The first course in speech. Speech Teacher, 1956, 5, 26-33.

Jones, Horace Rodman. The present status of beginning speech courses in colleges and universities. Central States Speech Journal, 1955, 6, 10-11.

Lohr, James W. Alumni use of communicative activities and recommendeded activities for the basic course: A survey. Speech Teacher, 1974, 23, 248-251.

London, Norman T. Professional attitudes toward a first-course requirement in speech in central states colleges and universities. Central States Speech Journal, 1963, 14, 173-176.

London, Norman T. Professional attitudes toward a first course in speech and its requirement in American colleges. Speech Teacher, 1964, 13, 25-31.

McCroskey, James C. Oral Communication apprehension: A summary of recent theory and research. Berlin, Germany: International Communication Association Convention, 1977.

Pearson, Judy C. The influence of the level of instruction and the sex of the teacher on the criticism of classroom speeches. Iowa Journal of Speech Communication, Fall 1980, in press.

Pearson, Judy C. and Yoder, Donald D. Preferences and perceptions of the high communication apprehensive student toward public speaking and interpersonal communication. Iowa Journal of Speech Communication, Spring 1980, 16-24.

TABLE 1

PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES REQUIRING THE BASIC COURSE IN 1963, 1968, 1973, AND 1979 AND REQUIRING THE BASIC INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION COURSE IN 1977

Particular Colleges/Year	1963	1968	1973	1977	1979
All Colleges	51%	40%			
Arts & Sciences			58%	37%	45%
Education			62%	28%	53%
Business			42%	24%	50%
Preprofessional			37%	24%	*
Humanities			42%	26%	*

* Data unavailable

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS REPORTING BASIC ORIENTATIONS AND PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS AND ALUMNI REPORTING PREFERRED ORIENTATION TO THE BASIC COURSE

Orientation	1968	1973	1978	Students 1980	Alumni 1980
Public Speaking	54%	21%	51%	11%	4%
Fundamentals	21%	12%	*	*	*
Multiple Offerings	13%	39%	*	31%	33%
Communication	4%	24%	*	*	*
Voice and Articulation	2%	1%	*	*	*
Combination Course	*	*	40%	54%	55%
Interpersonal Communication	*	*	5%	2%	7%
Communication Theory	*	*	2%	*	*
Small Group Communication	*	*	1%	*	*
Other Courses	*	*	*	2%	1%

* Data unavailable

TABLE 3

RELATIVE CLASS TIME DEVOTED TO THEORY AND PRACTICE
REPORTED BY SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS, AND
PREFERRED BY STUDENTS AND ALUMNI
(Expressed in Percentage)

Relationship of Theory to Practice	More Theory than Practice	Equal Theory than Practice	More Practice than Theory
1973--Schools	6%	18%	76%
1978--Schools	33%	13%	54%
1980--Students	19%	41%	40%
1980--Student Preferences	2%	45%	53%
1980--Alumni Preferences	1%	20%	79%

TABLE 4

NUMBER OF SPEECHES THAT WERE INCLUDED IN THE BASIC PUBLIC SPEAKING COURSE OR ARE RECOMENDED TO BE INCLUDED IN THE BASIC SPEECH COMMUNICATION COURSE

(Expressed in Percentage)

Year	0	1-3	4-6	7 or more
1978	0%	6%	68%	26%
1980--Students	0%	61%	34%	5%
1980--Student Preferences	2%	65%	31%	2%
1980--Alumni Preferences	0%	41%	50%	9%

TABLE 5

NUMBER OF ORAL INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION ASSIGNMENTS THAT WERE INCLUDED IN THE BASIC INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION COURSE OR ARE RECOMENDED TO BE INCLUDED IN THE BASIC SPEECH COMMUNICATION COURSE

(Expressed in Percentage)

Year/Assignments	0	1-3	4-6	7 or more
1980--Students	2%	36%	36%	26%
1980--Student Preferences	0%	56%	35%	9%
1980--Alumni Preferences	3%	31%	55%	11%

TABLE 6

PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS DEVOTING SIGNIFICANT TIME TO SPECIFIED ACTIVITIES

Year/Activity	Informative Speech	Persuasive Speech	Group Discussion	Interview
1968	92%	90%	45%	4%
1973--Public Speaking	86%	88%	27%	3%
1973--Communication	51%	57%	74%	35%
1978--Public Speaking	91%	88%	26%	*
1978--Interpersonal Communication	15%	8%	69%	*

* Data unavailable

TABLE 7

PUBLIC SPEAKING ASSIGNMENT IDENTIFIED AS MOST IMPORTANT IN 1980

(Expressed in Percentage)

Group/Assignment	Informative Speech	Persuasive Speech	Presentational Speech
Students	25%	21%	49%
Alumni	29%	33%	32%

TABLE 8

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION ASSIGNMENT IDENTIFIED AS MOST IMPORTANT IN 1980

(Expressed in Percentage)

Group/Assignment	Conversation	Interview	Group Discussion
Students	11%	45%	36%
Alumni	23%	32%	41%